

## FORM B – BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

### Photograph



Northwest (façade) and southwest elevations

### Locus Map



**Recorded by:** Wendy Frontiero and Kathleen K. Broomer  
**Organization:** Gloucester Historical Commission  
**Date (month / year):** d r a f t – June 2016

Assessor's Number    USGS Quad    Area(s)    Form Number

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**Town/City:** Gloucester

**Place:** (*neighborhood or village*):  
downtown

**Address:** 289 Main Street

**Historic Name:** Blackburn Building

**Uses:** Present: commercial

Original: commercial

**Date of Construction:** 1900

**Source:** plaque on building

**Style/Form:** Classical Revival

**Architect/Builder:** Ezra L. Phillips

**Exterior Material:**

Foundation: not visible

Wall/Trim: brick with granite and terra cotta trim

Roof: tar and gravel / rubber

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:**  
none

**Major Alterations (*with dates*):**

Rear addition, storefront renovations, infill of window openings on side and rear, replacement sash (all, L 20<sup>th</sup> c?)

**Condition:** good - excellent

**Moved:** no ☒    yes ☐    **Date:**

**Acreage:** 0.05 acre

**Setting:** Mixed commercial/residential/industrial streetscape, one block from Gloucester Harbor. Surrounding buildings date primarily from early 19<sup>th</sup> through late 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, of varied styles, heights, and materials.

# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GLOUCESTER

289 MAIN STREET

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Area(s) Form No.

GLO.

☒ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

*If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

*Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.*

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

*Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.*

Located on the east side of upper Main Street, the Blackburn Building occupies nearly all of its small, rectangular lot. The building consists of a three story main block and a one-story rear addition. The parcel is bordered by property of Gorton's of Gloucester on the northeast (an R&D building) and southeast (surface parking lots), and commercial buildings to the northwest and southwest. Nearby commercial properties on both sides of Main Street are mainly one-story masonry buildings constructed in the early and late 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, interspersed with wood frame residential buildings from the late 18<sup>th</sup> through late 19<sup>th</sup> century that have been adapted for commercial use.

The main block of the Blackburn Building measures 21 feet wide by 40 feet deep and rises three stories to a low-pitched shed roof that slopes down to the rear. Walls are clad with red brick and trimmed chiefly with cream-colored brick and terra cotta ornament. Windows have rectangular openings with 1/1 double hung sash, and characteristically display rectangular granite sills and lintels. Two sidewall chimneys rise from the southwest elevation.

The northwest (façade) elevation contains a storefront and a single-leaf, offset doorway at the base; two floors, presumably of office space, in the middle; and a paneled brick parapet at the roof edge. The ground story is framed by banded brick piers and a high wood entablature with a dentil course and molded cornice; its wood-frame storefront consists of a single leaf door recessed within an angled entrance, and modern plate glass shop windows and transoms. The symmetrical second floor features an angled bay window recessed with a frame of cream-colored molded terra cotta tile and a prominent cornice; flanking windows are ornamented with gauged and flared stepped lintels of cream-colored brick. The second story is surmounted by a full entablature formed of cream- and red-brick colored terra cotta tile, containing a granite plaque with "1900 BLACKBURN 1900" carved in bas relief. The third floor contains two symmetrical windows with gauged and flared lintels of cream-colored brick, topped by an entablature of cream- and red-colored terra cotta tile with a band of egg-and-dart molding.

Side and rear elevations are much more utilitarian, punctuated by irregular fenestration with plain granite sills and lintels. Rear windows on the main block have been filled in with plywood. The northeast elevation is distinguished by a large, angled bay window at the back of the second floor, which is sheathed in wood and capped by a wood cornice.

The one-story rear addition, also constructed of brick, rises from a poured concrete foundation to a flat roof. Its only visible fenestration is a window opening high on its rear (southeast) elevation, which is filled with glass block; a modern light fixture centered above it suggests that a doorway may be located below.

The space between the Blackburn Building and the adjacent Gorton's of Gloucester building is occupied principally by a brick- and concrete-paved patio, with shrubs and small trees adjacent to the Blackburn Building. A brick arcade with metal railings in the openings joins the facades of the two buildings at the sidewalk edge. The rear of the Blackburn Building's lot is screened by a vertical board wood fence.

The Blackburn Building is a lively and handsome example of turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century commercial architecture in Gloucester, and is one of the few survivors of its building type and period in this stretch of Main Street. Well-preserved, it is distinguished by its highly embellished façade with polychrome trim of various materials.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

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*Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.*

The Blackburn Building is uniquely significant in Gloucester for its association with the city's "all-time fisherman-sailor hero" Capt. Howard Blackburn (1859-1932), who had this building constructed to house his saloon on the first floor and residence above. Born in Port Medway, Nova Scotia, Blackburn came to Gloucester at the age of seventeen to find employment on the vessels of the halibut fleet. One of the city's most important businessmen, and an adventurer who also completed two solo crossings of the Atlantic Ocean, Blackburn secured his position in Gloucester history in January 1883, when he rowed sixty miles into Newfoundland with the frozen body of his dorymate, five days without food or water, after they became separated in a winter storm from the Gloucester schooner *Grace L. Fears* [Garland, 132]. He lost all of his fingers, both thumbs to the first joint, and one toe to frostbite in the ordeal. After spending the winter with a family in Newfoundland, Blackburn returned to Gloucester a hero, "someone who had fought the sea for the highest stakes and won" ["A Desperate Journey"].

Unable to return to fishing, Howard Blackburn opened a cigar store with part of the \$500 the community raised for him, and soon applied for a liquor license, turning the business into a saloon. This brick building replaced Blackburn's earlier 1½-story wood-frame saloon. Descriptions of the business alternated between "saloon" and "soft drinks," apparently reflecting Gloucester's periodic shifts to being a "dry" town, in addition to the limits imposed by Prohibition from 1920 onward. Blackburn's enterprise was popular with townspeople and seafarers alike, and he conducted business here until his death. A section of the saloon's mahogany bar top survives in the library of the Cape Ann Museum.

Blackburn's first solo crossing of the Atlantic in 1899 earned him the moniker "Man of Iron," as reported by the *Cape Ann Breeze*. He sailed the Gloucester sloop *Great Western* to England in sixty-two days. On his second solo crossing, he sailed the twenty-five-foot Gloucester sloop *Great Republic* to Portugal in 1901, setting a new record of thirty-nine days. The *Great Republic* was restored by the Gloucester Historical Commission and is in the collection of the Cape Ann Museum.

Howard Blackburn married Theresa Larry and survived her by one year. He is buried in the Fishermen's Rest section of Beechwood Cemetery, West Gloucester. Upon his death, flags were flown at half-staff on various buildings, including City Hall, and every craft in Gloucester Harbor. In Blackburn's honor, dory races between sailors from Gloucester and Nova Scotia are held annually in mid-June, and the Blackburn Challenge Rowing Race, involving twenty-one miles around Cape Ann, occurs each July.

Ezra L. Phillips (1870-1937) opened his architecture office on Main Street in 1894, establishing what became Gloucester's premier architectural firm over the next century. Per the Cape Ann Museum, which maintains the firm's drawings in its collection, Phillips was born in Gloucester. His training in architecture has not been established. He had various business interests and served as vice-president of the Gloucester Safe Deposit and Trust Company; treasurer of the Cape Ann Anchor Works, the Russia Cement Company, the Gloucester Coal and Lumber Company, and the Rockport Granite Company; and director of the Cape Ann Savings Bank and the Cape Ann YMCA. Gloucester native Timothy Francis Holloran (1883-1966) apprenticed with Phillips as a draftsman at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was an architect with the firm by 1918, and made a partner in 1926. Holloran's son, Robert Timothy Holloran, AIA (1919-2008), joined the firm after earning degrees from Wentworth Institute in Boston (1938) and Tufts College (now University, 1940). The firm was known as T. F. & R. T. Holloran by 1970. Robert Holloran later joined the Boston firm of Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott. The Blackburn Building was a comparatively early commission of the firm. Other early commissions include the Ezra Phillips House, 30 Gloucester Avenue (ca. 1890, GLO.101); Eastern Avenue School, 85-87 Eastern Avenue (1907, GLO.1188); and The Colonial, 22-40 Lexington Avenue (ca. 1915, GLO.1169), a retail store complex.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Gloucester maps and atlases: 1884, 1899.

Sanborn maps: 1888, 1892, 1898, 1903, 1909, 1917, 1949, 1960.

Gloucester directories: 1870-1930s.

Blackburn, Howard. Find a Grave Memorial #71479969. Via [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com). Retrieved April 2016.

Garland, Joseph. *The Gloucester Guide. A Stroll Through Place and Time*. Charleston and London: History Press, 2004.

"A Desperate Journey" [Howard Blackburn]. Via <http://www.capeannmuseum.org/blackburn>. Retrieved April 2016.

*Continuation sheet 2*

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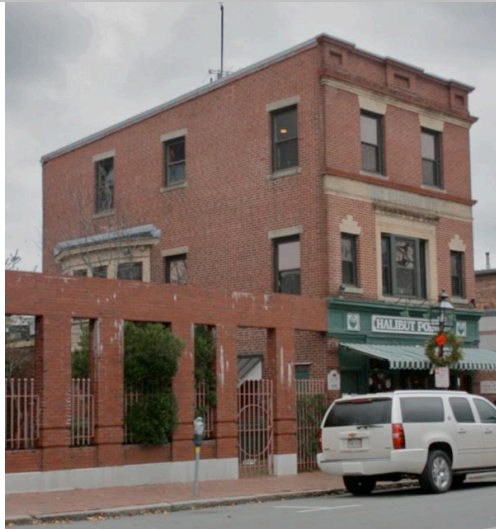
GLO.

"Capt. Blackburn, Navigator, Dies. Lone Adventurer on Seas Had Career of Thrills." Special Dispatch to the Globe. *Daily Boston Globe* (1928-1960); 5 November 1932; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Boston Globe, p. 15.

"Phillips and Holloran Architectural Drawings." Cape Ann Museum. Via [www.capeannmuseum.org/research/archive/phillips-architectural-drawings](http://www.capeannmuseum.org/research/archive/phillips-architectural-drawings). Retrieved April 2016.

MHC MACRIS database.

## SUPPLEMENTARY IMAGES



Northeast and northwest (façade) elevations



Southwest and southeast elevations

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## National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

- ☒ Individually eligible      ☐ Eligible **only** in a historic district
- ☐ Contributing to a potential historic district      ☐ Potential historic district

Criteria:    ☒ **A**    ☒ **B**    ☒ **C**    ☐ **D**

Criteria Considerations:    ☐ **A**    ☐ **B**    ☐ **C**    ☐ **D**    ☐ **E**    ☐ **F**    ☐ **G**

Statement of Significance by

*The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.*